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SUBJECT Interview with FBI Director Webster

ATTORNEY GENERAL WILLIAM FRENCH SMITH: When you consider that the FBI has thousands of employees, that every now and then a rotten apple is bound to show up.

DIRECTOR WILLIAM WEBSTER: It's a very sad day for us. It's really only news because it has happened, to our knowledge, only this time.

FRED GRAHAM: We're back talking with FBI Director William Webster, now about spies.

And that little clip that we just saw was the occasion of the indictment of an FBI agent, Richard Miller, on charges. And I'm not going to get into that right now. And, of course, we won't specifically because he hasn't been brought to trial. And, of course, you wouldn't want to comment specifically about that.

But generally speaking, I can't remember a time when there have been so many spies caught recently and so many pending cases. Now, are there just a lot more spies, or are you catching more of them, or is it both?

WEBSTER: Well, I think it's both. And like you, we can't remember a time. We've researched it. We're convinced that there have been more espionage cases brought this year than at any time in our history. And that includes the war years.

GRAHAM: Now, do you have any estimates about how many spies, how many Soviet agents you think there are?

WEBSTER: Well, some of those figures are classified, Fred, and I don't want to go too much...

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GRAHAM: But you...

WEBSTER: You can do it this way: About one-third of all the Soviet diplomatic establishment has had intelligence training. And approximately the same percentage applies to the Soviet Bloc countries who are present. There is a higher Soviet and Soviet Bloc presence in this country than at any previous time.

GRAHAM: And that's how many people?

WEBSTER: Well, I think we'd be safe if we lumped it in. We're talking between two and three thousand who've had intelligence training. Now, that doesn't mean that they're a hundred percent engaged in espionage. It means that they are trained, interested in, and occasionally and specifically tasked to try to acquire different types of information, some of it legally, and a good deal of it illegally, that we're trying trying to protect.

GRAHAM: Now, recently one of these cases that you were just talking about involved Northrop Corporation employee who is accused of trying to sell to the Russians Stealth technology, the Stealth airplane.

WEBSTER: That's right.

GRAHAM: And we are told that the way this person was apprehended was that he went to the Soviets, some Soviet establishment; and your sort of routine surveillance picked this fellow up and nailed him when he was trying to contact the Soviets. Now, it must take an enormous number of people to keep that kind of surveillance.

WEBSTER: It requires more people than we have, and we're likely to have, to keep track of every known Soviet, Soviet Bloc intelligence officer 24 hours a day. We can't do it. I don't want to get into the numbers that it requires to keep track of just one intelligence officer 24 hours a day.

So, we have to do it selectively, we have to do it intelligently, and we have to do it utilizing what we know about particular activities. Those are things that, unfortunately, we can't really discuss in detail.

GRAHAM: Well, let me ask you something that you can discuss, I think. When I was a younger person, the Americans who became traitors, if you will, did it for ideological reasons. They were Communists, Marxists.

WEBSTER: Right.

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GRAHAM: But the people you're nailing now just want money. They're selling.

WEBSTER: Money.

GRAHAM: What's happening?

WEBSTER: Well, I'm not a psychologist. I can't answer that. I wish I knew the answer to that question. And in a way, I suppose, from the standpoint of the security of the country, the well-being of the country, I'd rather have it this way than the other way, to have people who -- enough people who really felt we had the wrong system.

Here, we have a problem of greed, a problem of not thinking about the damage they're doing the country. This can be addressed in other ways: an alertness by the companies themselves.

GRAHAM: But it seems to me that in your background checks, where you used to find out if they were in left-wing organizations when they were in college -- what do you look for now?

WEBSTER: Well, we look for the same things. But we're not checking these people. They're being checked by other agencies who give clearances for access to classified information.

You're right, money is the main reason. Occasionally they'll say revenge, they'll find other reasons, dissatisfaction with their employer.

GRAHAM: It's kind of a sad commentary on our society, isn't it, though, that people are betraying it for money rather than some ideological persuasion?

WEBSTER: Well, Fred, we have a lot of people in prison. We have more people in prison now than at any time in our history. It's a form of crime, and I think it's an absence of perspective. The enormous amount of damage, it just doesn't seem to be realized by the people who are selling it. Or if they realize, they don't care.

GRAHAM: Sometimes the prices they ask are so paltry compared to...

WEBSTER: That's right. That's right.

GRAHAM: Re Richard Miller. Now, there has been an allegation there that he was doing things he shouldn't have been

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doing. There were allegations about him selling Amway products out of the back of his car. And the question is, was the FBI vigilant enough? And particularly because he was a Mormon, I have to ask that, because it's been said -- there was the Mormon Mafia, they say. His boss and some of the other higher-ups in that Los Angeles office were Mormons. Did you -- were you a little lax on this one?

WEBSTER: I don't think so. No, I don't think -- as far as loyalty, absolutely not. And that case is still coming to trial, so we can't really talk about it. But I've had inspectors in place going through all of this. I've reviewed all the reports.

The Amway story seems to be out of whole cloth. There is no evidence of any kind that's come to my attention or the attention of our inspectors that he did any of those things.

He was an agent who had an overweight problem. He was disciplined for it. I think that that sense of lack of professionalism that was spreading about him was a cause of great concern to me and to others, because we like to think of ourselves as tough, disciplined and professional.

But when you talk about loyalty, you're having to ask yourself what's in a man's mind. And it's very difficult to sense that a particular person is about to betray his country.

GRAHAM: Thank you very much.

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GRAHAM: We're talking with FBI Director William Webster about spies.

One of your recent spy cases involved the arrest of a man and his wife who are alleged to be Czech spies, from Czechoslovakia. But the man was indicted. His wife was not indicted. She was named as an unindicted co-conspirator. And yet the allegation seems to be that she was in it up to her neck. And it's been suggested that the FBI counterintelligence agents fumbled that one, that they are essentially trained to catch spies, and not make cases. Is that what happened there, that they didn't -- when she asked for a lawyer, they didn't give it to her right away, and therefore you don't have a clean case against her?

WEBSTER: More and more of these cases are coming to prosecution. And in the past, I think there have been instances where the primary objective was to gather intelligence. But these agents are trained. They're given the same legal training,

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the same awareness of constitutional requirements as any other special agent.

GRAHAM: But they didn't they -- they fouled this one up, didn't they?

WEBSTER: Oh, I think it's premature to say that. The Department of Justice has not made a final conclusion on the other. And keep in mind, Fred, that when...

GRAHAM: You mean they still might indict here? You're saying that her case is not necessarily tainted.

WEBSTER: That's correct.

And keep in mind that what we confront in a criminal trial is something far different than finding out answers to things. We have to prove things beyond a reasonable doubt. We have to carry a very heavy burden, including issues that abide throughout the trial, as to the manner in which the questions were given.

But I am satisfied, from my knowledge of this case, that nobody's constitutional rights were -- nobody was impermissibly held up by their heels, or any of that sort of thing.

GRAHAM: Well, there's no allegation of that. But not giving her a lawyer is a different thing.

Terrorism. It's remarkable that the year you became Director of the FBI there were a hundred acts of terrorism. This year there's something like 13. How'd you do that?

WEBSTER: Well, I don't think I did it.

GRAHAM: Well, how did the FBI do it? I mean.

WEBSTER: I think the FBI did it with the help of a lot of people in state, federal and local law enforcement concerned about the issues. Going back over the period, I think one of the things we did was we, without making a major rush to resume senseless domestic security investigations into organizations based entirely upon what they were saying or advocating, we focused on those who were engaging in acts of violence or planning acts of violence, and developed a substantial intelligence analytical base, computerized; trained our agents to recognize and correlate other acts of violence, such as bank robberies, which were associated with raising money for terrorist activities; began to understand the purposes and goals. We have enhanced electronic techniques for court-authorized wiretaps, closed-circuit video tapes. And within a relatively small budget

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-- there has not been a very substantial increase in the amount of funds expended -- we've been able to make criminal cases.

Now, this year alone, I think there's some nine terrorist incidents that were averted, prevented because we got there first. That, of course, is the ultimate goal, to get there before the bomb goes off. Almost impossible to do, and yet we've done it in major cases.

GRAHAM: It sounds like you have a lot of these organizations subverted.

WEBSTER: Well, I don't...

GRAHAM: Infiltrated.

WEBSTER: I don't want to describe exactly all that we've done, because that makes it impossible for us to keep up the work. But we have used lawful techniques to get on a handle on where they're going and what their plans are, and we've used that to stop it and to make criminal cases. We've also put many of them in jail who were responsible for multiple cases.

GRAHAM: We just have about a minute here. But there has been some political pressure, particularly from Senator Jeremiah Denton, that the FBI should change its guidelines so that it could surveil groups that were not really involved in terrorist activities because they might become involved. And you've resisted that.

Now, would you say now that the proof of the pudding is in the eating, and that, as a matter of fact, you've shown that without doing that sort of thing, you can take care of terrorist groups?

WEBSTER: Well, I think the...

GRAHAM: I'm sorry I asked you that tough question. We're going to have to go back and get the answer later.